

## **Extended discussion of Soundoff Commander's column 3/26/2020**

Your Fort Meade garrison leadership, along with our tenant command leadership, are working hard to talk with you regarding the COVID-19 threat; providing updates on the installation's efforts to protect the health of our Service Members, Civilians, Retirees, and family members against the COVID threat.

By now, most of you are aware that the Senior Commander, MG Omar Jones, has directed all Army garrisons within the National Capital Region to elevate the Health Protection Condition level to Charlie Minus, or Substantial Threat. The Minus does not mean that COVID is any less of a threat to our community. However, the augmented designation does allow us to withhold the implementation of specific measures pending further public health assessments.

Concurrently, MG Jones also declared a Public Health Emergency effective last Saturday at midnight. This declaration grants military commanders, specifically me as the garrison commander and Col. James D. Burke as the MEDDAC Commander, additional authorities to protect DoD personnel and families. I would like to take a few minutes and expound on each of these directives and what they mean to you.

Health Protection Condition Charlie means that there is a Substantial, wide-spread risk of COVID-19 transmission in and around Fort Meade. There are seven risk reduction measures that have been implemented or that the garrison, ICW our public health officials recommendations, will consider going forward.

**First Measure.** Limiting Access Points on to the Installation. There are currently four Access Control Points on Fort Meade. Prior to the COVID outbreak, these four ACPs were not sufficient for the roughly 47K commuters coming on and off the installation each day. As the garrison and 119 Tenant Organizations transitioned to a Telework program and reduced services to Mission Essential only, our traffic throughput is significantly down. I have directed my Director for Emergency Services to provide me recommendations as to which gate or gates to close to restrict movement. I also provided him the following guidance –

- \*Minimize the impact to those ME personnel commuting who assigned to NSA, US Cyber Command, and DISA
- \*Maintain our ability to properly vet visitors
- \* Ensure quick access to Kimbrough Ambulatory Care Center. I understand that limiting access on and off post is a further inconvenience placed on you, but is absolutely needed to restrict movement and blunt the spread of COVID-19.

**Second Measure.** Reduce Garrison services to only Mission Essential. For the latest closures and cancellations on Fort Meade, please refer to our Fort Meade Homepage. The question of Mission Essential has come up many times during our Town Halls; specifically, who determines if someone is Mission Essential and what functions are Mission Essential. I will address both. There are 119 tenant organizations on Fort Meade – 704<sup>th</sup> MI BDE, Asymmetric Warfare Group, Cryptologic Support Group, DISA, EPA, DINFOS are just a few examples. The commander or director of his or her respective organization determines who their Mission Essential personnel is. For the roughly 800 garrison employees – those that work in one of my 15 Directorates – your supervisors, Deputy Garrison Commander and I make that determination. For my employees, I sent a note to my Directors yesterday with specific guidance regarding our Civilian workforce:

-All employees whose duties can be performed by Telework will do so immediately – This is not optional.

-Employees who are over the age of 60 or have verified chronic medical conditions and are unable to telework, will be placed on Weather and Safety leave immediately. Verified conditions can include, Cardio-Vascular Disease, Cancer, Hypertension, Diabetes, Lung Disease and pregnancy.

-Employees whose primary functions require them to be physically present will be placed on a 14-day rotational shift – that is, 50% will work one pay period, and the other will be placed on Weather and Safety Leave.

-The Director for Family, Morale, Welfare, and Recreation will implement a rotational schedule for CYS employees immediately.

-The Director for Emergency Services will manage their employees to ensure continuity of services.

The second part to that question is, who determines which services or functions are Mission Essential. Again, tenant commanders will determine that for their respective formations based on mission requirements. For the garrison, I've determined the following are Essential Services:

1) Emergency Services (Fire, Police, Investigations, Dispatch, Security, and support to MDW)

2) Child Youth Services for those children whose parents/guardians have been identified as Mission Essential by their respective command.

**Third Measure.** Modify/Re-Scope Commissary, PX, and Shoppette Operations. I want to point out that the services we continue to provide on Fort Meade align with those throughout the state of MD; in some cases, we have taken additional measures to protect our employees and you. At the checkout lines, we have marked lines on the ground to remind our patrons of social distancing guidelines, we have implemented a consumable goods rationing process to ensure everyone has a fighting chance for some chicken. We will continue to work with our public health, state, and county officials and implement changes as required.

**Fourth Measure.** To ensure personal safety, and in accordance with guidelines for limiting movement and social distancing, I am considering the implementation of an installation-wide curfew for minors. One of my most profound memories of living on a military installation is that our children are allowed to move about in relative safety – but they tend to do this in groups. We have to enforce social distancing practices to limit their exposure or secondary exposure to you – the parents. To be clear, I'm not implementing a curfew at this time, but as COVID progresses, I need to work through all of my options to protect this community and ensure our commands can conduct their vital missions throughout the duration of this pandemic. This does not mean that if you are coming through the gates, or driving on post after hours that you will be stopped or fined. I understand people have valid reasons for being out and about.

**Fifth Measure.** Place outdoor gathering locations off limits. As you are aware, the playgrounds and community centers under Corvias control have been closed and are considered off-limits. Unfortunately that has not been enough to keep people from using these locations. However, I intend to close the playgrounds on Meade proper as well – these playgrounds are located behind the Main Post Chapel in the vicinity of Burba Lake. That said, I have no intention of closing off Burba Lake's walking path or fishing piers. Additionally, the track around McGlachlin Parade Field and all of our sidewalks on post will remain open for recreational use. I want, and encourage, people to exercise and get some fresh air and sun. But we need to be smart – social distancing.

**Sixth Measure.** Enforce social distancing recommendations within the PX / Commissary / Shoppette. As I alluded to previously, the General Managers of the PX and Commissary have taken actions IAW CDC guidelines, their leaderships directives, and in alignment with the state of MD to protect their

employees and you. Before I go on, I have to recognize all these employees who come to work each and every day to support US; I ask that the next time you visit one of these establishments, take a second to thank them. They are doing their part to support us, we need to do our part to support them and our battle buddies. Please, practice social distancing at these establishments.

**Seventh And Final Measure Relating to HPCON – C(-).** Reduce Child Youth Services to Mission Essential Only. To ensure the safety of our children and world-class CYS care providers, I directed Mr. Fran Jamison to begin an orderly closure of our CDCs and Family ChildCare Centers. Effective March 23, there were only two CDCs operational (CDCs 1 and 3). By the time you read this, I may have exercised my intent to have only CDC 3 available for the exclusive care of those children whose parents are deemed Mission Essential.

Also, on Tuesday, all family care centers, or FCCs, were to be closed. Children in FCCs whose parents are deemed mission essential will be transferred to CDC 3 until we get through this pandemic. Similar to the consolidation of our CDCs, we will also consolidate our School-aged Centers and Youth Center to one facility. Effective immediately, SAC 1, on Reece Road, is our operational and fully-staffed combined SAC and Youth Center.

The last point I want to address is the Declaration of a Public Health Emergency at Fort Meade. Specifically, what does that mean and what are the benefits? Quite simply, this means that I have additional authorities governed by DOD Instruction in times of emergency. This allows me the authority to task tenant organizations for resources – personnel, SME, and facilities. How does this benefit you? One example will be using Service Members to begin screening functions at Kimbrough, the Commissary, the PX, the Shoppettes, and our CDC to ensure your protection. This is just one example of how I plan to take advantage of these authorities. I want to thank my partner commands in advance for their support.

## **Closing**

Thank you again for your participation in tonight's town hall. Your feedback and questions are vital. If you have any questions about the changes discussed today or for anything related to COVID on Fort Meade, go to [home.army.mil/Meade](https://home.army.mil/Meade) and Click on Covid. Also stay tuned to our social media pages.

I mentioned earlier about the declaration of a health emergency and the authorities it granted me to task partner organizations, but that in no way implies that our partners haven't been pulling together to support us already in this troubling time. Last week I mentioned the Field Band stocking our Commissary shelves. This week, 55<sup>th</sup> Combat Camera has voluntarily picked up that mission. Several organizations including the 704th MI BDE, 780th MI BDE, 902nd MI GRP, 70th ISR, Navy Cryptological Warfare Group 6 have all been providing support for Kimbrough during their advanced screening procedures. I also know our neighborhoods are banding together to help each other through this time. Unfortunately, we still have pockets of folks who seem to be stuck on selfish. And you know who I'm talking about: the person who takes advantage of the large gaps in the lines at Starbucks to cut and get their order in first. There are still way too many people playing in our playgrounds and climbing on equipment without any regard to what their actions might cause to someone else. We need to do better, Team Meade.

I know these times are hard. This abnormal, new normal goes against everything we've done. As the weather improves, there's nothing I'd rather do than play a round of golf or bring families together for a cookout. But this is not the time to do that. It will come soon enough. Be patient, be kind and we'll talk soon.

